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DEPT FOR AF/PD (ANYASO, TITUS, LISEBY), AF/W (ACOOK)
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PARIS FOR ARS (DWINTON)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KIRC](#) [SCUL](#) [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: GPRA REPORT: WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH LAUNCH

REF: STATE 17838

¶1. SUMMARY: Post held a series of program activities on March 5, 2009 to launch Women's History Month. The day's activities, part of the Fulbright/Humphrey International Visitor Alumni Outreach program, included a book discussion, an exhibit of art works by female artists and the screening of a film about sexual harassment. After giving background information about Women's History Month and the Mission's interest in promoting women's development, PAO Rhonda J. Watson introduced the facilitator of the book discussion, Dr. David Houeto. The ARS Nouveaux Horizons book under discussion, titled "Autonomisation et reduction de la pauvret: outils et solutions pratiques" (Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook), dealt with institutional reforms required to foster development. END SUMMARY.

¶2. DATE OF ACTIVITY: March 5; Second quarter, FY 09.

¶3. PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION/OBJECTIVES: Emphasizing the concept of "Empowerment" as it has implications for bolstering democracy, combating corruption and promoting economic growth. Dr. Houeto's presentation focused on the links between empowerment, local governance, access to justice and legal aid and market development.

¶4. MPP UMBRELLA THEMES AND AUDIENCE REACHED: Bolstering democracy and combating corruption; Mission outreach promoting women, art and culture, promoting economic growth and mutual understanding. 80 participants, including former President of the High Court of Justice, lawyers, faculty members of the University of Abomey-Calavi, journalists, NGO members, officials from other Diplomatic Missions, Mission staff, and other interested guests attended the conference that was covered by all major media outlets including TV, radio and print media. Estimated audience reached: 3.5 million.

¶5. ACTIVITIES/IMPACT/RESULT: In her opening remarks, PAO Watson gave a brief history of Women History Month that started back in 1978 and highlighted President Obama's proclamation for 2009. Copies of this proclamation were distributed to the audience. Dr. HOUETO's engaging PowerPoint presentation of the French version of the book, "Empowerment and Poverty Reduction" an outgrowth of World Development Report 2000/2001. This title was published in French by ARS Nouveaux Horizons for distribution in Francophone Posts. The book provides a framework for empowerment that concentrates on increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives. This framework pertains to five areas of action to improve development effectiveness: provision of basic services, improved local governance, improved national governance, access to justice and legal aid, and pro-poor market development. This Sourcebook gives tools and practices that concentrate on a wide range of topics to encourage the empowerment of the poor. These include poor people's enterprises, information and communication

technologies, and diagnostic tools including corruption surveys and citizen report cards.

Throughout his presentation, Dr. Houeto emphasized that to achieve sustainability in development programs, experts and donor agencies need to change principles of development aid by adopting the mindset of partnership with local populations to incorporate indigenous knowledge, skills and values. 40 copies of the book were distributed to members of the audience who participated in a raffle-style drawing.

Following the book discussion, the American Cultural Center (ACC) hosted an art exhibit by three female Beninese artists to promote women in the arts. At the opening session of the Art Exhibit, Cultural Affairs Assistant Osseni introduced the artists: Sister Henriette Marie Goussikinkey, Rebecca Odjo-Favi and Nelly Denakpo.

Rebecca Odjo Favi, a young artist born in 1977, began painting in the nineties. She participated in painting training workshops from 1993 to 1999 and introduced drawing techniques to children ranging in age from 10 to 15.

Trained at the Institute of Training Art in Mbalmayo, Cameroon in 1997, Sister Goussikinkey uses cloth, acrylic, stained glass paint, and Chinese ink in her work.

The third artist, Nelly Denakpo, is also the President of a local youth association. Her work features the Amazons, a female military regiment of the Kingdom of Danxome(now Benin) who were successfully used by King Agadja in defeating the neighboring kingdom of Savi in 1727. These female warriors were used for a hundred years and gained a fierce reputation as brave and fearless warriors. Nelly Denakpo

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also produced a documentary on the same subject that was launched on March 7 and will be projected at the American Cultural center on March 20, 2009.

To conclude the day's activities, the ACC showed a USAID-funded and locally-produced film dealing with sexual harassment entitled "Au Nom de Toutes les Femmes" (On Behalf of All Women). In opening remarks, PAO Rhonda J. Watson noted that this film was chosen to raise public awareness on sexual harassment in secondary schools and in the work place in accordance with the theme for International Women's Day 2009, "Women and Men United Against Violence to Women and Girls."

The guests expressed their appreciation for this initiative in presenting the film and voiced their interest in securing copies of the film that they could show in other venues. According to the National Coordinator of the EMPOWER project, five female attorneys belonging to the association of the women attorneys of Benin have volunteered to assist victims of sexual harassment free of charge.

16. NON-USG SOURCES OF IN-COUNTRY FUNDING/IN KIND SUPPORT:

The participation of a local speaker, Dr. David Houeto, Alumni, and officials such as Clotilde Medegan, the former President of the High Court of Justice; Jeronime MONGBO, the Coordinator of the Empower Project at Care International, and other guests like faculty members of the University of Abomey-Calavi brought vivid experience to the discussion.

17. QUALITY OF USG SUPPORT: Excellent. Kudos to Dennis Pierce, from the Department of Justice, for sharing his experience in women empowerment programs in Benin. His experience and knowledge of the subject were highly appreciated.

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